Fundamentals of Islam Part I

Iman

By Maulana Sayyid Abul A'la Maududi

Contents

KNOWLEDGE

THE FIRST STEP

Allah's Greatest Gift

Brothers in Islam! We all as Muslims sincerely believe that Islam is the greatest blessing that Allah has given us in this world. We find our hearts filled with gratitude to Him for including us in the Ummah of the Prophet Muhammad, blessings and peace be on him, and bestowing upon us this unique blessing. Allah Himself describes Islam as His most invaluable gift to His servants: 'Today I have perfected your Din way of life for you, and I have completed My blessing upon you, and I have willed that Islam be the Way for you' (al-Ma'idah 5:3).

To be truly grateful for this greatest favour, you must therefore render to Allah His due. If you do not do so, you are undoubtedly an ungrateful person. And what ingratitude can be worse than to forget what you owe to your God.

How can we, you may ask, render these dues?

Since Allah has been gracious enough to include you in the Ummah of the Prophet Muhammed, blessings and peace be on him, the best way of showing gratitude-and there is no other way-is to become totally committed followers of the Prophet. And, since He has made you a part of the Muslim Ummah, to become true Muslims. If you do not, the punishment for your ingratitude will be as great as the original gift was. May Allah save us all from this great punishment! Amin.

You will now ask: How can we become Muslims in the true sense of the word? This question I shall answer in considerable detail in my forthcoming addresses; but today I want to look at a point of fundamental importance, without which we cannot hope to

discover true faith. This, you must understand, is the first essential step on your road to becoming a true Muslim.

Is Islam a Birthright?

But, first, think for a while: What does the word 'Muslim', which we all use so often, really mean? Can a person a Muslim simply because he is the son or grandson of a Muslim? Is a Muslim born a Muslim just as a Hindu Brahman's son is a Brahman, or an Englishman's son is born an Englishman, or a white man's son is born a white man, or a Negro's son is born a Negro? Are 'Muslims' a race, a nationality or a caste? Do Muslims belong to the Muslim Ummah like Aryans belong to the Aryan race? And, just as a Japanese is a Japanese because he is born in Japan, is a Muslim similarly a Muslim by being born in a Muslim country?

Your answer to these questions will surely be: No. A Muslim does not become truly a Muslim simply because he is born a Muslim. A Muslim is not a Muslim because he belongs to any particular race; he is a Muslim because he follows Islam. If he renounces Islam, he ceases to be a Muslim. Any person, whether a Brahman or a Rajput, an Englishman or a Japanese, a white or a black, will, on accepting Islam, become a full member of the Muslim community; while a person born in a Muslim home may be expelled from the Muslim community if he gives up following Islam, even though he may be a descendant of the prophet, an Arab or Pathan.

Such will surely be your answer to my question. This establishes that the greatest gift of Allah which you enjoy-that of being a Muslim-is not something automatically inherited from your parents, which remains yours for life by right irrespective of your attitudes and behaviour. It is a gift which you must continually strive to deserve if you want to retain it; if you are indifferent to it, it may be taken away from you, God forbid.

No Mere Verbal Profession

You agree that we become Muslims only by accepting Islam. But what does acceptance of Islam mean? Does it mean that whoever makes a verbal profession-'I am a Muslim' or 'I have accepted Islam'-becomes a true Muslim? Or does it mean that, just as a Brahman worshipper may recite a few words of Sanskrit without understanding them, a man who utters some Arabic phrases without knowing their meaning becomes a Muslim? What reply will you give to this question? You Cannot but answer that accepting Islam means that Muslims should consciously and deliberately accept what has been taught by the Prophet Muhammad, blessings and peace be on him, and act accordingly. People who do not so behave are not Muslims in the true sense.

No Islam Without Knowledge

Islam, therefore, consists, firstly, of knowledge and, secondly, of putting that knowledge into practice. A man can be white and have no knowledge; because he is born white he will remain so. Similarly, an Englishman will remain an Englishman though he may have no knowledge, because he has been born an Englishman. But no man becomes truly a Muslim without knowing the meaning of Islam, because he becomes a Muslim not through birth but through knowledge. Unless you come to know the basic and necessary teachings of the Prophet Muhammad, blessings and peace be on him, how can you believe in him, have faith in him, and how can you act according to what he taught? And if you do not have faith in him knowingly and consciously, as fully as you can, how can you become true Muslims?

Clearly it is impossible to become a Muslim and remain a Muslim in a state of ignorance. Being born in Muslim homes, bearing Muslim names, dressing like Muslims and calling yourselves Muslims is not enough to make you Muslims; true Muslims know what Islam stands for and believe in it with full consciousness.

The real difference between a Kafir (who does not accept God's guidance and is ungrateful to Him) and a Muslim is not that of a name, that one is called Smith or Ram Lal and the other Abdullah. No one is a Kafir or a Muslim simply because of his name. Nor does the real difference lie in the fact that one wears a necktie and the other a turban. The real difference is that of knowledge. A Kafir does not understand God's relationship to him and his relationship to God. As he does not know the will of God he cannot know the right path to follow in his life. If a Muslim, too, grows up ignorant of God's will, what ground can there be to continue calling him a Muslim rather than a Kafir?

Dangers of Ignorance

Listen carefully, brothers, to the point I am making. It is essential to understand that to remain in possession of, or to be deprived of, the greatest gift of Allah-for which you are so overwhelmed with gratitude-depends primarily on knowledge. Without knowledge, you cannot truly receive His gift of Islam. If your knowledge is so little that you receive only a small portion of it, then you will constantly run the risk of losing even that part of the magnificent gift which you have received unless you remain vigilant in your fight against ignorance.

A person who is totally unaware of the difference between Islam and Kufr (rejection of God's guidance and ingratitude) and the incongruity between Islam and Shirk (taking gods besides God) is like someone walking along a track in complete darkness. Most likely his steps will wander aside or on to another path without him being aware of what is happening. Maybe he will deceived by the sweet words of the Devil, 'You have lost your way in the darkness Come, let me lead you to your destination. The poor traveler, not being able to see with his own eyes which is the right path, will grasp the Devil's hand and be led astray. He faces these dangers because he himself does not possess any light and is, therefore, unable to observe the road signs. If he had light, he would neither lose his way nor be led astray.

This example shows that your greatest danger lies in your ignorance of Islamic teachings and in your unawareness of what the Qur'an teaches and what guidance has been given by the Prophet, blessings and peace be on him. But if you are blessed with the light of knowledge you will be able to see plainly the clear path of Islam at every step of your lives. You will also be able to identify and avoid the false paths of Kufr, Shirk and immorality which may cross it. And, whenever a false guide meets you on the way, a few words with him will quickly establish that he is not a guide who should be followed.

Acquire Knowledge:

Brothers! On this knowledge, whose absolute necessity I stress once again, depends whether you and your children are true Muslim and remain true Muslims. It is, therefore, hardly a trivial matter to be neglected. You do not neglect cultivating your land, irrigating and protecting your crops, supplying fodder to your cattle or doing whatever else is essential to the well-being of your trades and professions. Because you know that if you do you will starve to death and so lose the precious gift of life. Why then should you be negligent in acquiring that knowledge on which depends whether you become Muslims and remain Muslims? Does such negligence not entail the danger of losing an even more precious gift—Your Iman (faith)? Is not Iman more precious than life itself? Most of your time and labour is spent on things which sustain your physical existence in this life. Why can you not spend even a tenth part of your time and energy on things which are necessary to protect your Iman, which only can sustain your being in the present life and in the life to come?

I am not asking you to become scholars, read voluminous books or spend a large part of your lives in the pursuit of knowledge. It is not necessary to study so extensively to become a Muslim. I only want each one of you to spend about one hour of the twenty-four hours of the day and night in acquiring the knowledge of his Din, the way of life, the Islam.

Every one of you, young or old, man or woman, should at least acquire sufficient knowledge to enable him to understand the essence of the teachings of the Qur'an and the purpose for which it has been sent down. You should also be able to understand clearly the mission which the Prophet, blessings and peace be on him, came into this world to fulfil. You should also recognize the corrupt order and system which he came to destroy. You should acquaint yourselves, too, with the way of life which Allah has ordained for Muslims.

No great amount of time is required to acquire this simple knowledge. If you value Iman, it cannot be too difficult to find one hour every day to devote to this.

BETWEEN ISLAM AND KUFR

Muslims or Kafirs?

Brothers in Islam! Every Muslim believes, as you too must surely believe, that Muslims are different from Kafirs; that God likes Muslims and dislikes Kafirs; that Muslims will find God's forgiveness, while Kafirs will not; that Muslims will go to Heavend (Jannah) and Kafirs to Hell (Jahannum). I want you to consider why there should be so much difference between Muslims and Kafirs.

Kafirs are as much offspring of Adam and Eve as you. They are human beings like yourselves. They possess hands, feet, eyes and ears. They breathe the same air as you, drink the same water and inhabit the same land. The God who created you also created them. So why should they be ranked lower and you higher? Why should you go to Heaven and why should they be cast into Hell?

Consider carefully. Such a vital difference between man and man cannot be simply due to the fact that you have names like Abdullah and Abdur Rahman and they have names like Kartar Singh, Smith and Robertson, or that you are circumcised and they are not, or that you eat meat and they avoid it, or that they eat pork and you do not. Allah, who has created all human beings and who is the Sustainer of all, cannot be so unjust as to decide on such petty grounds which of His creatures to send to Heaven and which to Hell.

Where, then, does the real difference lie between Muslims and Kafirs? The answer is that it lies, simply, in the very nature of Islam and Kufr. The meaning of Islam is submission to God while the meaning of Kufr is denial and disobedience of God. Muslims and Kafirs are both human beings; both are slaves of God. But one becomes exalted and meritorious by reason of recognizing his Master, obeying His orders and fearing the consequences of disobeying Him; while the other disgraces himself by failing to recognize his Master and carry out His orders. This is why Allah is pleased with Muslims and displeased with unbelievers. That is why He promises true Muslims that they will be rewarded with Heaven and warns unbelievers that they will be cast into Hell

Knowledge and Actions

The two things which separate Muslims and Kafirs are, therefore, knowledge and actions. That is, you must first know who your Master is, what His orders are, how to follow His wishes, which deeds please Him and which displease Him. When these things are known, the second step is to make yourselves true slaves of your Master by giving up your own wishes in deference to what He desires.

If your heart desires to do a certain act and your Master's order is against it, you should carry out that order. If something seems good to you but your Master says

that it is bad, you must accept it as bad. And if something else seems bad but your Master says it is good, then you must accept it as good. If you think a certain action will be harmful but your Master says that it must be done, then done, then done it must indeed be, even though it may entail you in loss of life or property. Similarly, if you expect to benefit from a certain action but your Master forbids it, you must refrain from it even though it might have brought all the worldly treasures.

This is the knowledge and actions by which Muslims become true servants of Allah, on whom He bestows His mercy and whom He rewards with honour and dignity. Conversely, Kafirs, since they do not possess this knowledge, are Allah's disobedient slaves and are denied His blessings.

Now, in all fairness, tell me: if you call yourselves Muslims but in fact are as ignorant and disobedient as a Kafir, can you in reality be superior to the latter merely on the strength of bearing different names, wearing different clothes and eating different foods? Can you on this basis be entitled to the blessings of God in this world and in the Hereafter? Islam is not a race or family in which membership is automatically passed on from father to son. A high caste priest's son will not command respect in the eyes of God, if he does wrong deeds, just because he is born into a priestly home; nor will He look down on the son of a low caste family, disregarding his good deeds, simply because of his birth.

On this point God has explicitly stated in His Book: 'Indeed the noblest among you in the sight of God is the most God-fearing of you' (Al-Hujurat 49:13). That is, the more you know God and the more you obey His commandments, the more honourable you are in His sight, Ibrahim was into the home of an idolator, but he came to know God and obeyed Him. That is why God made him Imam (leader) of the whole world. The son of Nuh was born into a prophet's home but he did not understand God and disobeyed Him. Despite his high family connection, God so punished him that the punishment became an object lesson for the world.

Understand, therefore, thoroughly that whatever differences there are in the sight of Allah between man and man depend entirely on the state of their knowledge and actions. Both in this world and the Hereafter, God's blessing is reserved for those who recognize Him, accept the right path shown by Him, and carry out His commandments. Those who do not do these things, whether their names are Abdullah and Abdur Rahman or Kartar Singh, Smith or Robertson, are identical in the sight of God. They are unworthy of His blessings.

Why Are Muslims Humiliated Today?

Brothers! You call yourselves Muslims and you believe that Allah showers His blessings on Muslims. But open your eyes and see if those blessings are in fact descending on you? You cannot know what will happen to you in the Hereafter until after your physical death, but you can most certainly look around you and see your condition here on earth.

There are so many hundreds of millions of you in the world that if each of you were to throw a single pebble they would make a mountain. But even though there are so many Muslims and Muslim governments, the world is in the hands of those who have rebelled against God. Your necks are in their grip, to be turned to whichever side they like; your heads, which should not bow before anybody except Allah, are now bowed before human beings. Your honour, which no one dared to touch, is now being trampled upon. Your hands, which were once always held high, are now lowered and stretched out before your enemies. Ignorance, dependence, poverty and indebtedness have subjected you to ignominy everywhere.

Is this the blessing of Allah? If it is not—but rather a sign of anger—then how strange it is that it is Muslims on whom it is descending! You are Muslims and yet are wallowing in ignominy! You are Muslims and yet are slaves! This situation is impossible as it is for an object to be white and black. If Muslims are the loved ones of God, how can they be treated disgracefully? Is your God (God forbid) so unjust that—while you, for your part, acknowledge His due and obey His orders—He allows the disobedient to rule over you, and punishes you for your obedience to Him?

If it is an article of faith with you that God is not unjust and obedience to God can never result in disgrace, then you will have to concede that there is something wrong in your claim to be Muslims. Although you may be registered as Muslims on your birth certificates, Allah does not base His judgments on what is written on pieces of paper. God prepares his own list of obedient and disobedient servants, and it is in this list that you must search to find your true position.

Allah sent you His Book so that you may know Him and learn how to obey Him. Have you ever tried to discover what is written in it? Allah sent His Prophet to teach you how to become Muslims. Have you ever tried to find out what His Prophet has taught? Allah explicitly informed you which behaviour debases man in this world and the Hereafter. Do you avoid such behaviour? What answers do you have to these questions? If you admit that you have neither sought knowledge from God's Book and His Prophet's life nor followed the way shown by him, then how can you claim to be Muslims and to merit His reward? The rewards you are getting now are in direct relation to how good Muslims you are; and your rewards in the Hereafter will be calculated on the same basis.

We have already seen that the only difference between Muslims and Kafirs is in the matter of knowledge and actions. Men who call themselves Muslims but whose knowledge and actions are the same as those of Kafirs are guilty of blatant hypocrisy. Kafirs do not read the Qur'an and do not know what is written in it. If so-called Muslims are equally ignorant, why should they be called Muslims? Kafirs do not know the teachings of the Prophet, blessings and peace be on him, and the straight path he has shown to reach God. If Muslims? Kafirs follow their own desires instead of the commands of Allah. If Muslims are similarly willful and undisciplined, setting their own ideas and opinions on a pedestal, indifferent to God and a slave to lust, what rights have they to call themselves Muslims? Kafirs do not distinguish between Halal (what is

permitted by Allah) and Haram (what is prohibited by Allah) and make indiscriminate use of everything and anything, irrespective of whether it is Halal or Haram. If Muslims behave the same as non-Muslims, what difference is there between them and Kafirs?

Put simply: If Muslims are as devoid of knowledge about Islam as Kafirs, and if a Muslim does all those things which a Kafir does, why should he be considered superior to a Kafir and why should his fate not be the same as that of a Kafir? This is a question on which we must all reflect very seriously.

My dear brothers! Do not for a moment think that I am trying to brand Muslims as Kafirs. This is not my purpose at all. I ask myself, and implore each one of you similarly to ask his own heart, as to why we are being denied the blessing of God. Why are tribulations of all sorts descending upon us from all sides? Why are we disunited and shedding each Other's blood? Why are those whom we call Kafirs (that is, the disobedient slaves of God) everywhere dominating of us? And why are we, who claim to be His obedient slaves, living in servitude in so many parts of the world?

The more I have reflected on the reason for this situation, the more I have become convinced that almost the only difference now left between us and Kafirs is that of mere name; for we in no way lag behind them in neglect of God, in being devoid of fear of Him and in being disobedient to Him.

I say 'almost' because there is, of course, a difference between us: we know that

The Qur'an is the Book of God, while Kafirs do not, yet we treat it as a Kafir treats it. And this makes us all the more deserving of punishment. We know that Muhammad, blessings and peace be on him, is the Prophet of Allah and yet we are as unwilling as a Kafir to follow him. We know that God has cursed liars, has positively declared Hell as the abode of all who give and take bribes, has denounced those who borrow and lend at interest as the worst of sinners, has condemned slander as being as bad as eating a brother's flesh, and has warned that obscene behaviour, pornography and debauchery will meet with the severest punishment. Yet despite knowing all this we freely indulge in all these vices as if we had absolutely no fear of God's displeasure.

This is why we are not rewarded: we are Muslims in appearance only. The fact that those who do not accept God's sovereignty rule over us and subject us to ignominy on every possible occasion shows that we are being punished for ignoring Islam –God's greatest gift to us.

Dear brothers! Nothing I have said today is intended as blame. I have not come to censure. My aim is to kindle to desire in you to recover a treasure that has been lost. Such a desire arises when a man realizes exactly what he has lost and how valuable it was. I have spoken sharp and pungent words only to awaken you and compel you to think.

Desire for Knowledge

To become a real Muslim, as I said, the foremost requisite is knowledge of Islam.

Every Muslim ought to know the teaching of the Qur'an, which ways were shown by the Prophet, blessings and peace be on him, what Islam, is and what those things are which really differentiate Islam from Kufr. Nobody can be Muslim without this knowledge. The pity is that you show no desire to acquire this knowledge. This indicates that still you do not realize what a great gift you are being deprived of.

My brothers! A mother does not give milk to her child until he cries and demands it. When a man feels thirsty and he searches for water, God brings him to it. If you yourselves are not conscious of your thirst it will be useless if even a well brimming with water appears before you. You must first understand what a great loss you are suffering by remaining ignorant of Islam. The Book of God is with you but you do not know what is written in it. You do not even know the meaning of the kalimah (La ilaha illa'llah Muhammadu 'r-rasulu 'llah (There is no god but Allah; Muhammad is Allah's Messenger), by reciting which you enter Islam; nor do you appreciate what responsibilities devolve on you after reciting this Kalimah. Can there be a greater loss than this for a Muslim?

You know the damage caused if crops are burnt; you know the suffering which results from failure to earn a livelihood; you know the harm resulting from loss of property. But you do not know the loss of being ignorant of Islam. When you understand the nature of this loss, you will yourselves come and ask to be spared it. And when you make this request then, insha'allah, means will be available to restore this greatest of gifts to you.

HOW MUSLIMS TREAT THE QUR'AN

Brothers in Islam! Muslims are the only people in the world today fortunate enough to possess the word of God preserved in its original form, free from all distortions, and precisely in the wording in which it was sent down upon the Prophet, blessings and peace be on him. Paradoxically, these same Muslims suffer the misfortune of being denied the countless blessings and benefits which the word of God must give to those who believe in it. The Qur'an was sent to them for them to read it, understand it, act upon it, and, with its help, establish on God's earth the rule of His law. The Qur'an came to grant them dignity and power. It came to make them true vicegerents of God on earth. And history shows that whenever they acted according to its guidance, it did make them the leaders of the world.

Irreverence and Misuse

But now the Qur'an's usefulness, for many Muslims, consists only in keeping it in their houses to drive away jinns and ghosts, in writing its verses on amulets to hang round their necks or washing those amulets with water and then drinking it, or in reading its contents without comprehending their meaning in the hope of receiving some reward. No longer do they seek guidance from it for their lives. No longer do they ask it to tell then what should be their beliefs, morals and actions, nor how they should conduct transactions, what principles they should observe while dealing with enemies and friends, what the rights are of their fellow beings and of their own selves. Nor do they

turn to it to find what is true and what is false, whom they should obey and whom disobey, who their friends are and who their enemies, where honour, well-being and benefit are to be found and where disgrace, failure and loss.

We Muslims have given up looking for answers to these important questions in the Qur'an. Instead, we now ask Kafirs, idolators, misguided, selfish people, even our own ego and desires—and follow what they advise. What invariably happens to those who ignore Allah and follow the precepts of other has happened to us too. We are reaping only what we have shown everywhere in the world—in Palestine, the Middle East, Pakistan, Indonesia and many other places.

The Qur'an is the source of every good: it will give whatever and as much as you ask from it. If you seek from it such trivial, frivolous and spurious things as how to scare away jinns and ghosts, how to cure coughs and fevers, how to succeed in litigation and find a job—then you may get them, but only them. If you seek supremacy on earth and the power to rule the world you may get that too. And if you wish to reach near God's Throne ('Arsh), the Qur'an will take you there. If you receive only a few drops from the ocean, do not blame the Qur'an, blame yourselves. For the whole ocean is there waiting for him who knows how to take it.

Incomprehensible Contradictions

The cruel jokes, brothers, which we Muslims play with the Holy Book of Allah, are so inane that if we saw someone else doing such things in any other sphere of life, we would mock them and even brand them as lunatics.

Tell me, what would you say if somebody got a doctor's prescription and hung it round his neck after wrapping it in a piece of cloth or washed it in water and drank it? Would you not laugh at him and call him a fool? Yet this is the very treatment being given before your eyes to the matchless prescription written by the greatest of all doctors to provide a cure for all your ailments—and nobody laughs! No one even reflects that a prescription is not meant to be hung round the neck nor are its words to be washed in water and drunk.

Tell me, what would you think if some one who was ill picked up a book on medicine and began to read it, believing, thinking that this would cure him? Would you not say that he was deranged? Yet this is how we treat the Book which the supreme Healer has sent for the cure of our diseases. We think that just by flicking through all its pages, our diseases will disappear without our following the directions given in them or abstaining from the things which they pronounced harmful. Are we not in the same situation as the man who considers that reading a book on medicine will cure his illness?

If you receive a business letter in a language you do not know, you go to a man who knows the language to find out what it says. You remain anxious and restless until you

have found out what the letter says, even though it will bring only some partly worldly profit. But the letter sent to you by the Lord of the worlds which can bring you all the benefits of this—world and the Eternal Life is carelessly set aside. You do not show any uneasiness at not understanding its contents. Is this you astonishing?

I am not trying to make you laugh. Reflect for a while on these facts and your hearts will tell you that the greatest possible injustice is being done to the Book of Allah. Ironically, the culprits are the very people who proclaim their faith in it and proclaim their readiness to sacrifice their lives for it. No doubt they do have faith in it and love it more than their lives, but the pity is that it is they, more than anyone else, who treat it outrageously. And the consequences of such treatment are quite plain to see.

The Consequences

Understand fully that Allah's word does not come to bring misery, disgrace and suffering to man. 'We have not sent down the Qur'an upon you that you be wretched' (Ta Ha 20: 1—2). On the contrary, the Qur'an is the source of happiness and success. It is impossible for a people to possess God's word and yet suffer disgrace and ignominy, live under subjugation, be trampled on a kicked around, and carry the yoke of slavery on their necks, being led by the nose like animals. A people meet this fate only when they do injustice to the word of God.

Look at the fate of the Israelities. They were given the Tawrah and Injil, were told:

Had they established the Torah and Gospel and what was sent down to them by their Lord, they would surely have partaken of all blessings from above them [heaven] and beneath their feet [earth] (al-Ma'idah 5: 66).

But they adopted a wrong attitude towards these Books of Allah, and reaped the consequences:

An ignominy and helplessness were laid upon them, and they were laden with the burden of God's anger. That, because they used to disbelieve God's messages and slay the Prophets against all right; that, because they disobeyed and were transgressors (al-Baqarah 2: 61).

If people possess Allah's Book and still live in disgrace and subjugation, they are surely being punished for doing injustice to Allah's word. The only way to save yourselves from Allah's anger is to turn back from this grave sin and start trying to render. His Book its due. Until you do, your condition will never change—even if you open colleges in each and every village, all your children graduate from universities, and you amass millions through unscrupulous means.

No Islam without Submitting To the Qur'an

Brothers! Two most important things every Muslim must know to do justice to the Book of God: who is truly a Muslim and what the world 'Muslim' means.

Human beings who do not know what humanity is and what the difference is between man and animal will inevitably indulge in behaviour unworthy of the human race and attach no value to being human. Similarly, people who do not know the true meaning of being Muslims and how a Muslim is different from a non-Muslim will behave like non-Muslims and will not be worthy of being Muslims.

Every Muslim, adult or child, should therefore know what it means to be a Muslim, what difference being a Muslim must make to his life, what responsibilities devolve on him, and what limits are set by Islam within which a man remains a Muslim and by transgressing which he ceases to be a Muslim.

Islam means submission and obedience to God. To entrust yourselves completely to God is Islam. To relinquish all claims to absolute freedom and independence and to follow God's will in Islam. To surrender your selves before the sovereignty of God is Islam. If you bring all the affairs of your lives under God you are Muslims and if you keep any of the affairs in your own hands or entrust them to someone other than God you are not Muslims.

To bring your affairs under God means to accept unreservedly the guidance sent by God through His Book and His Messengers. It, therefore, becomes necessary to follow only the Qur'an and Prophet's sunnah. Muslims follow no authority other than that of God, whether it be their reason or customs. In every matter they seek guidance from God's Book and His Messenger to find what they should do not what they should not do. They accept without hesitation whatever guidance they get from there and reject whatever they find opposed to it.

Such total surrender to God is what makes one a Muslim. By contrast, people are certainly not Muslims who, instead of following the Qur'an and the Sunnah, obey the dictates of their own reason and desires, follow the practices of their own reason and desires, follow the practices of their forefathers, accept what is happening in society, and never bother to ascertain from the Qur'an and Sunnah how to run their affairs, or refuse to accept the teachings of the Qur'an and Sunnah by saying: 'They do not appeal to my reason', or 'They are against the ways of my forefathers' or 'The world is moving in an opposite direction'. Such people are liars if they call themselves Muslims.

The moment you recite the Kalimah: 'La ilaha illa'llah Muhammadu' r-rasulu' llah', you accept that the only law you recognize is the law of God, only God is your sovereign, only God is your ruler, only God you will obey, and only the things given in God's Book and by His Messengers are true and right. It means that as soon as you become Muslims you must renounce your authority in favour of God's authority.

Consequently, you have no right to say, 'My opinion is this, the prevalent custom is

this, the family tradition is this, that scholar and that holy person say this'. In the face of Allah's word and His Messenger's Sunnah, you cannot argue in this manner. You should judge everything in the light of the Qur'an and Sunnah; accept what is in conformity with them and reject what runs counter to them, irrespective of the people who may be behind them. It is a contradiction in terms to call yourselves Muslims on the one hand, and, on the other, follow your own opinions or the customs of society or some person's words or actions as against the Qur'an and the Sunnah. Just as a blind person cannot claim to have eyes, nor a deaf person to have ears, so a person who refuses to subordinate the affairs of his life to the dictates of the Qur'an and the Sunnah cannot call himself a Muslim.

No one who does not want to be a Muslim can be compelled to be one against his will. You are free to adopt any religion you like and call yourselves by any names you like. But, once having called yourselves Muslims, you must fully understand that you can remain Muslims only as long as you stay within the bounds of Islam. These bounds are: to accept the word of God and His Messenger's Sunnah as the ultimate criteria of truth and justice and to consider everything opposed to them as wrong. If you remain within these bounds you are Muslims, but if you overstep them you cease to be part of Islam. To continue, in such circumstances, to consider yourselves and call yourselves Muslims is tantamount to both self-deception of others. 'Whose judges not according to what God has sent down, they are the unbelievers' (al-Ma'idah 5: 44).

TRUE MEANING OF IMAN

Difference the Kalimah Creates

Brothers in Islam! You become Muslims by reciting a few words called the Kalimah:

La ilaha illa 'llah Muhammadu 'r-rasulu 'llah

There is no god but Allah; Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah.

On pronouncing these words a man is supposed to have radically changed. He was Kafir, now he is a Muslim; he was impure, now he is pure. He deserved Allah's displeasure; now he deserves to be loved by Him. He was going into Hell; now the gates of Heaven are open for him.

On a more concrete level, in social life, this Kalimah becomes the basis for differentiating one man from another. Those who recite it constitute one nation, while those who reject it form another. If a father recites it but his son refuses to, the father is no longer the same father, nor the son the same son. The son will not inherit anything from the father, his mother and sisters may even observe purdah from him. On the other hand, if a total stranger recites the Kalimah and marries into a Muslim family, he and his children become eligible for inheritance.

The power of the Kalimah is thus so strong that it takes precedence even over blood ties; it can join strangers together into a nation; it can cut members of the same family off from each other.

Is Mere Utterance Enough?

Why should the Kalimah make such a big difference between man and man? What is so special about it? After all, it contains only a few letters like 'L', 'A', 'I', 'M', 'R' and 'S'. Joined together and pronounced, do they somehow have the power to work magic so as to radically change a man? Can merely saying a few words create such an enormous difference?

Brothers! A little reasoning will immediately tell you that merely opening your mouths and uttering a few syllables can never have such an impact. Idol worshippers no doubt believe that by reciting some formula of holy words mountains can be moved, earth can be split and fountains can gush out of it, even though they do not know its meaning. This is because they ascribe supernatural powers to letters, and believe that only uttering them is necessary to make their powers work.

This is not so in Islam. The effectiveness of words lies in their meaning. If they do not penetrate deep into your hearts and have an impact powerful enough to effect a change in your thoughts, in your morals, and in your actions, then their utterance is meaningless and ineffectual.

A simple example will illustrate this point. Suppose you are shivering in cold weather and you start shouting, 'cotton, quilt! Cotton, quilt' The effect of cold will not be any less even if you repeat these words all night a million times on beads or a rosary. But if you prepare a quilt stuffed with cotton and cover your body with it, the cold will stop. Or suppose you feel thirsty and shout the whole day, 'water, water'; your thirst will not be quenched. What you need to do is to get some water and take a mouthful. Or again, suppose you are suffering from cold and fever and you decide the best remedy is to chant the name of medicines used to cure these illnesses. You will not get better; but if you actually take these medicines, cold and fever will disappear, insha'allah.

This is exactly the position of the Kalimah. Mere utterance of six or seven words cannot conceivably transform a Kafir into a Muslim, or an impure person into a pure one, or a damned person into a favoured one, nor can it send a man to Paradise instead of Hell. This transformation is possible only after you have understood the meaning of these words and made it penetrate your hearts and change your lives.

So, when you recite these words, you should be conscious what an important commitment you are making to your God, with the whole world as your witness, and what a great responsibility you are taking on as a result of your commitment. Once you have made the affirmation consciously, the Kalimah must inform all your thoughts

and reign supreme in your whole lives: no idea contrary to it should form part of your mental furniture. Whatever runs counter to the Kalimah alone true. After affirming this Kalimah you are not at liberty, as are the unbelievers, to do as you like. You have to follow what it prescribes and renounce what it forbids.

If you recite the Kalimah in this manner, only then can you become true Muslims, only then is created that overwhelming difference between man and man that we have just been discussing.

Meaning of the Kalimah

What, let me tell now, is the meaning of the Kalimah. What do you in fact pledge through it?

The literal meaning of the Kalimah is simple: there is no God but Allah; and Muhammad, blessings and peace be on him, is the Messenger of Allah.

Covenant with Allah

The word ‘ilah’ found in the Kalimah means God. Only that being can be our God who is the Master, Creator, Nourisher and Sustainer, who listens to our prayers and grants them, and who alone is worthy of our worship and obedience.

Saying La ilaha illa ‘llah means two things. First, you have acknowledged that the world has neither come into being without a God nor has many gods. God is there; He alone is God, and there is no other being except Him which possess divinity. Second, you have accepted that this same God is your Lord and Master as well as of the whole universe. You yourselves, and each and every thing that you have or is found in the world, belong to Him alone. He is the Creator and the Provider. Life and death are under His command. Both trouble and comfort come from Him. Whatever one receives is really given by Him; whatever is taken away is taken away by His command. He alone should be feared. From Him alone should we ask any and everything. Before Him alone should we bow our heads. He alone is worthy of worship and service. We are slaves or servants of nobody save Him, nor is anyone else our Master or Sovereign. Our duty is to obey Him abide by His laws---and His alone.

This is the covenant which you make with Allah as soon as you recite La ilaha illa ’llah, and while so doing you make the whole world your witness.

If you violate this covenant, your hands and feet, and tiniest hair on your bodies and every particle on earth and in the heavens, all that witnessed you breaking your pledge, will testify against you in God’s court. You will find yourselves in such a hopeless position that not a single witness will be found to aid you. No barrister or trial lawyers will be there to plead your case in fact barrister and trial lawyers who in the courts of this world are themselves all too often guilty of bending the law to their

own ends, will themselves be standing there, like you, in the same hopeless position. That court will not acquit you on the basis of forceful pleading, false witnesses, or forged documents. You can hide your crimes from the police in this world, but not from God's police. The police here may be bribed, but not there. A witness in this world can give false evidence, but not Allah's witness. The judges of this world can do injustices, but God can never be unjust. And there is no escape from the jail to which Allah sends the guilty.

It is a great folly—the greatest of all follies—to enter into a false covenant with Allah. Before making the covenant, think it through thoroughly and then scrupulously adhere to it. You are under no compulsion to give a mere verbal pledge; but empty words shall not profit you.

Accepting the Prophet's Leadership

After La ilaha illa 'llah, you recite Muhammadu 'r-rasulu 'llah (Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah). This means that you accept Muhammad, blessings and peace be on him, as the man through whom Allah has sent you His guidance. If we acknowledge Allah as Master and Sovereign, it is essential to know what His will is. What deeds should we perform that would please Him and what deeds should we refrain from that would displease Him? What laws should we follow to receive His forgiveness and avoid His punishment? To explain all this to us, God appointed Muhammad, blessings and peace be on him, as His Messenger; for this very purpose through him He sent His Book.

The Prophet, blessings and peace be on him, having lived according to God's guidance, showed us the way we should lead our lives. So, when you say Muhammadu 'r-rasulu 'llah, you pledge to follow the way and law given by him and to reject anything which runs counter to it. If, after making this pledge, you abandon the code of life brought by the Prophet, blessings and peace be on him, and follow different and conflicting law, however widely they may be accepted, there can hardly by any worse liars and more dishonest people than you.

For you enter Islam only by solemnly affirming that you accept the code of life brought by him as the only true law and that you will faithfully follow it. It is on the basis of this affirmation that you become brothers unto Muslims, become eligible for inheritance from your Muslim fathers; on the same basis you were married to Muslim women, your children became legitimate and you secured the right to ask Muslims to help you, to give you alms and to be responsible for the protection of your lives, property, honour and dignity. Nothing can be more dishonest if, in spite of all this, you break your pledge.

If you make the pledge of La ilaha illa 'llah Muhammadu 'r-rasulu 'llah with a full understanding of its meaning. Then it is inconceivable that you will not comply with the laws of God even though no police or court forcing you to do so is visible in this

world. To anybody who thinks that it is easy to break the laws of God because God's police, army, court and jail are unseen, and that it is difficult to break earthly laws because of the undoubted presence of the police, army, court and jails of the Government, I would clearly say: Your affirmation of La ilaha illa 'llah Muhammadu 'r-rasulu 'llah is simply not truthful. You are trying to deceive your God, the whole world, all Muslims, and your own selves.

Obligations of Commitment

Brothers and friends! Now that we know the meaning of this Kalimah I wish to draw your attention to the obligations that result from it.

What does it mean to say that Allah is the Master of everything? It means that your lives are not your property; they belong to God. Your hands are not yours, nor do your eyes, your ears or any limb of your bodies belong to you. The lands you plough, the animals who work for you, the wealth and goods you derive benefit from—none of these is your own. Each and every thing belongs to god, and has been given to you as a gift.

You, therefore, have no basis whatsoever to make claims like 'life is mine, the body is mine, wealth is mine'. It is absurd to claim ownership after having accepted some other being as the real owner. If you sincerely believe that god is the Owner of all these things, then two things automatically follow.

First, since God is the real owner and you are merely trustees of things owned by Him, you must use these things strictly as He has told you, If you do otherwise, you are abusing your trusteeship; this would amount to cheating God. You have no right to move your hands and feet against His wish, nor to make your eyes see what He dislikes. You may not stomach anything contrary to His command. You possess no right over lands and properties against the wish of the Master. Your wives and children, whom you assume belong to you, are yours only because they have been given to you by your Master. Even they, therefore, must be treated not as you desire but as directed by Him. If you contravene His directions, you make yourselves usurpers. Just as you call people dishonest who seize other people's belongings, you, too, will be dishonest if you look on the gifts of God as your own property, and utilize them according to your own wishes or according to the wishes of someone other than God.

If you suffer hardship by acting according to the wish of your Master, so be it. If lives are lost, bodies are injured, families are broken or money and property destroyed in the process, why should you be grieved? If the Owner Himself decrees loss of His things, it is perfectly within His right. Of course, if you act against the wish of the Master and suffer hardship, you will undoubtedly be guilty because you will have damaged His property. For example: you do not own your lives. If you give away your lives according to your Master's wishes you will only be rendering His due. Giving your

lives while working against Him, however, would be criminal.

Second, you do no favour to your Master nor to anyone else, if you spend something given by Him in His cause. You may give away anything, do any duty, or even sacrifice your lives—which to you are very dear—but you are not doing Him a favour. The most you have done is to have rendered His due for His favour done to you. Is this an achievement to boast about, to demand acclaim for? Should people be praised just because they have repaid a favour? Remember that a true Muslim never gets puffed up for spending something in his Master's cause or for doing his duty to Him. On the contrary, he remains humble. Boasting and pride destroy good acts. Anyone who seeks praise, or does good work in order to earn praise, loses his right to receive any reward from God: 'He has sought reward in this world and has already received it here'.

Our Behaviour

Brothers! Imagine the extraordinary kindness shown you by your master! He asks you for things which really belong to Him and yet promises that it is a purchase He will pay you for. What unbounded generosity this is! 'God has brought from the believers their lives and their possessions in return for Paradise' (al-Tawbah 9: 111).

Such is the kindness of your Master. Now look at your conduct. You re-sell things to others which were given to you by your Master and which He had bought back from you. And what a paltry price you accept for your precious things! The 'buyers' make you work against the wishes of the Master. You serve them as if they are your sustainers. You sell your brains and your bodies—indeed, everything that these rebels of God want to buy. Can anything be more immoral than this? To sell a thing already sold is a legal and moral crime, even in this world. Those guilty of such crimes are tried in courts for cheating and fraud. Do you think you will escape trail in the court of God?

WHY IS THE KALIMAH UNIQUE?

Brothers in Islam! Let us consider further the meaning and essential implications of the Kalimah; for it is the very foundation of Islam. Believe it and you enter Islam on its strength; understand it fully and mould your lives in accordance with it and you become true Muslims. Without it you can neither enter nor remain in Islam.

The Parable

Allah calls it Kalimah Tayyibah, a good, pure and wholesome 'word', and thus defines it:

Are you not aware how God sets forth the parable of kalimah tayyibah? It is like a good tree—firmly rooted, its branches reaching into heaven. It gives its fruits every

moment by the permission of its Lord. So God sets forth parables unto men that they may bethink themselves. And the parable of kalimah khabithah (evil word) is like a corrupt tree—uprooted from the earth, having no permanence. God grants firmness unto those who have believed in the firm word, in the present life and in the world to come, and wrongdoers He lets go astray, for God does whatever He wills (Ibrahim 14: 24---7).

Kalimah Tayyibah is here likened to a noble tree, whose roots are firmly fixed in the earth and whose branches reach to the sky; and all the while it continues to yield abundant fruit, as commanded by its Lord. Set against it is the kalimah Khabithah, that is, an evil or corrupt word, a false belief and a baseless saying, which may be likened to a self-seeded plant growing in poor, shallow earth and easily plucked out with a single pull because its roots have no firm base.

So striking and beautiful is the parable that the more you reflect on it the more you will come to absorb the lessons that can be learnt from it.

Two Kinds of Trees

Consider examples of the two kinds of trees.

Look at an oak tree. How firmly it is rooted, to what great height it reaches, how extensively its branches spread, what fine foliage it bears! How did this tree acquire such strength and magnificence? From the nature of its fruit, the acorn. Its seed has an inherent right to become a great tree. And this right was so self-evident that when it made its claim, the earth, the water, the air, the warm day and the cool night, in fact, all the elements concerned, acknowledged it, and whatever it demanded from them was given to it.

Thus by merit it developed into a great tree; by yielding beneficial fruit and by the nobility of its dimensions it continued to demonstrate that it deserved to become a tree of mighty stature and that the help given it by the combined forces of earth and heaven was totally justified. More! It was the duty of the elements to give such help because the power that is possessed by the earth, water and air and other elements to nourish, develop and mature trees is precisely meant for the purpose of helping trees of noble species.

But what about wild, self-seeded plants? Where are their strengths and virtues? Their roots are so shallow they can be pulled up by child. They are so weak they wither away in the wind. If you touch them you may well be picked by thorns. If you taste them they may well bitter and harmful. God, only, knows how many of these sprout every day, and wither away. Why are they as they are? The reason is that they do not possess the intrinsic right to grow that the acorn does and which allows the growth of the mighty oak.

When there are no trees of noble species to grow, the earth, which by its nature cannot remain fallow, tolerates the growth of shrubs and weeds. Water does give nourishment, and some energy is supplied by the air, but none of the elements accepts the right of existence of these plants as they do of the oak. That is why neither the earth allows their roots to spread themselves within itself, nor is water willing wholeheartedly to give nourishment, nor is the air inclined to help them flourish. So when, with this poor subsistence, these plants grow unhealthy, tasting bad, often bearing thorns and poisonous fruits, it is conclusively demonstrated that earth and heaven are not crated to help the growth of such plants.

Keep these two examples before you and then think over the difference between the Kalimah Tayyibah and kalimah khabithah.

Characteristics of the Kalimah Tayyibah

Kalimah Tayyibah is a true ‘word’; so true that there cannot possibly be anything truer in the entire world; that the God of the whole universe is Allah alone. Each and every thing on earth and in heaven bears witness to this. Human beings, animals, trees, stones, particles of sand, flowing streams, the bright sun---is there a single thing out of all these which has been created by anybody but Allah, which can survive through anyone’s care and sustenance but Allah’s, which can be destroyed by anybody but Allah?

The whole universe has been created by Allah and its life and sustenance depend on His mercy; Allah alone is its Master and Ruler. So when you declare: ‘In this world godhood and sovereignty belong to none but the One God’, everything on earth and in heaven cries out: ‘You have told the truth. We all bear witness to it’. When you bow before Him, everything in the universe bows with you because all things are obedient to Him. When you obey His commandments, everything in the universe does likewise. When you walk along His path, you are walk along His path, you are not alone. In fact, the countless hosts of heaven and earth will be with you: from the sun in the sky to the smallest particle of dust, everything is following the path He has laid down. When you trust Him, you are not putting your trust in some insignificant power but in that greatest power which is the Master of the universe.

All the forces of earth and heaven, you can now understand, will support anyone who has faith in the Kalimah Tayyibah and moulds his life in accordance with it. He will grow and prosper throughout his life with it. He will grow and prosper throughout his life on earth and on into the world to come. Not for a single moment will failure or defeat touch him. This is exactly what Allah has stated in the Ayah quoted in the beginning: this Kalimah is like a tree whose roots are firmly embedded in the earth and whose branches are spread over the heavens bearing fruit perpetually, by the command of Allah.

Characteristics of the Kalimah Khabithah

In contrast to this, what does *kalimah khabithah* mean? Only that either there is no God or that there is someone else in addition to Him exercising Divine power. Just think! Can there be a more false and empty proposition? Is there anything in the world which lends credence to it? The atheist says there is no God, but everything on earth and in heaven denounces him as wrong: 'Together with all of us, you have been created by God, this very God has given you the tongue with which to utter this falsehood.' The idolator says that there are partners in His Divine powers; they too provide sustenance, they too have power over things; they too can determines our fates; they too can benefit or harm us; they too can listen to prayers and grant wishes; they too deserve to be feared and trusted; their write too runs on God's earth and their commands and laws too should be obeyed alongside those of God. Yet everything on earth and in heaven refutes this claim as an absolute lie and totally against reality.

Now consider how a person who believes in such a false proposition and leads a life in conformity with it can ever prosper in this world and in the Hereafter. Allah has, in His mercy, allowed them freedom for a certain duration and promised them sustenance. The elements of nature will, therefore, provide nourishment to them for a while, but they will not concede it as their right. They will be like the self-seeded shrubs and weeds I have just spoken of.

Contrasting Results

The same contrast is to be found between their fruits. Kalimah Tayyibah produces sweet fruits: it establishes peace in the world. Goodness, truth and justice predominate and people benefit accordingly. But what branches can you grow from an evil root like the *kalimah khabithah*? The more it grows the more it shoots out thorny branches; poison runs in its very arteries. And what fruit can grow on such branches as these? Only such as are continually bitter and poisonous.

See with your own eyes what is happening in the world where Kufr, idolatry or secularism prevail: man is bent on destruction of his fellow beings. Preparations for war are constantly being made. Nuclear weapons and poisonous gases are being manufactured. Nations are set on destroying each other. The powerful subjugate the weak simply to snatch away their bread. The weak are cowed by the armies and police and threats of jail and execution. They can find no escape from the oppression of the strong.

And what of individuals? Their morals are so depraved that even satan would be ashamed. Human beings are committing acts which even animals would hesitate to do. The rich suck the blood of the poor through exploitation and usury and force the poor to work as if they were slaves born just to serve them. Human dignity and rights are being trampled upon. Abortion is rife because people do not want their physical pleasures to be interrupted. Even wife swapping is practiced.

Little wonder whenever a plant has grown anywhere from this *kalimah khabithah*, it is full of thorns, and whatever fruit it produces is bitter and poisonous.

After giving the two parables, Allah says:

Thus God grants firmness unto those who have believed in the firm word in the present life and in the world to come, and the wrongdoers He lets go astray (Ibrahim 14: 27).

Thus Allah will grant strength and endurance in this world and in the Hereafter to those who have faith in the Kalimah Tayyibah. Conversely, He will set at naught all the endeavours of those wrongdoers who put their faith in the *kalimah khabithah*. They will not do anything good which will bear fruit in this world, or the next.

Why Are Believers in the Kalimah Not Flourishing?

You have heard, brothers, the difference between the Kalimah Tayyibah and the *kalimah khabithah* and their results. You will now surely ask: We believe in the Kalimah Tayyibah. Then how is it that we do not flourish and why are the unbelievers prospering?

I should answer this question, and I shall. But, rather than just becoming angry at my words, look into your hearts to see if I am speaking the truth.

In the first place, your claim that you believe in the Kalimah is not true. Believing in the Kalimah does not consist in its mere utterance. It must be rooted in the heart, it must drive out any belief opposed to it, it should make any actions in contravention of it well-high impossible.

Tell me, brothers, in the name of God, is this true of you? Are not hundreds of idolatrous and polytheistic beliefs prevalent among you – ideas totally opposed to the Kalimah Tayyibah? Are not the heads of Muslims being bowed before objects other than God? Are not Muslims afraid of forces other than Him? Do they not take others as their providers? Do they not sometimes put the laws of God aside and follow other laws instead without any qualms? Do they not sometimes openly state in the courts that they do not abide by the Shari'ah but by custom and usage? Are there not people among us who do not hesitate to violate the law of God for the sake of trifling material benefit? Are there not those who dread the anger of unbelievers but not the wrath of God? And those who are ready to go to any lengths to curry the favour of Kafirs but are unwilling to do anything to secure God's favour? And those who take the supremacy of Kafirs to be real but the rule of God as imaginary?

Tell me, for the sake of God, if all this is not fact? And if it is, what justification have you complaining that you are not prospering despite believing in the Kalimah Tayyibah? First you should become true believers in the Kalimah Tayyibah, and model

your lives on the pattern it lays down. If even then your lives do not become like trees which have firm and deep roots in the earth and which spread their luxuriant branches up to sky, then (I crave Allah's pardon) you may consider your God a liar for having made you false promises.

Are Followers of the Kalimah Khabithah Prospering?

Again, your contention that believers in the *kalimah khabithah* are prospering in this world is not correct. In the true sense, these people have never before prospered nor are they prospering now. You judge by their excessive wealth, their abundance of luxury goods and their outward trappings of splendour. Material prosperity is not real prosperity. Let their inner selves speak: how many of them have peace of mind? They are laden with luxury but their hearts are fiery furnaces which keep them anxious and restless. How has disobedience to the law of God turned homes into hell? How rampant is suicide in Europe and America? How widespread is divorce? How, through genocide, birth control and absorptions, is the human race being diminished? How are drugs and alcohol destroying the lives of many thousands of people? What a terrible struggle for markets and economic prosperity is raging among different nations and classes? How are jealousy, malice and enmity making men fight each other? How has the mad race for possessions made life bitter for so many people? And today's huge and magnificent cities, which look like paradise from a distance, contain thousands and thousands of people who are wallowing in misery. Do you call this prosperity? Is this what you are seeking so enviously?

Remember, my brothers, that the word of God can never be untrue. There is no Kalimah except the Kalimah Tayyibah by following which man may achieve glory in this-world and happiness in the world-to-come. Seek as you will, you will never be able to find any fault with it.

WHY BELIEVE IN THE KALIMAH?

Brothers in Islam! Why should we believe in the Kalimah, what benefits shall accrue to us by it? Let us try to find an answer to this important question.

Whatever work we do is done with some purpose or some benefit in view. We never do anything without some objective, goal or need. Why do you drink water? Because it quenches your thirst. If you were to discover that drinking water failed to quench your thirst, you would not waste your time doing it the next time you were thirsty. Why do you eat food? Simply because you want to satisfy your hunger and keep your strength to live. If it made no difference whether you ate food or not, you would naturally feel that it was a useless activity. Why do you take medicine when you are ill? Because you want to get rid of your illness and regain your health. But you soon stop taking medicines which do not work. Why do you work so hard cultivating land? So that crops, fruits and vegetables may be produced. But if nothing grew after you had sown the seeds, you would not again exert yourselves to plough the field, to sow the seed and water the ground.

Thus, whatever work you undertake always has an end in view. If the end is achieved, you consider the work fruitful, and if not, you say it was pointless.

Success in the Hereafter

Bearing this in mind, let us now ask: Why should the Kalimah be recited? The obvious answer is : to draw a distinction between a Kafir and a Muslim. But what is the nature of this distinction? Does it mean that if a Kafir has two eyes, a Muslim will have four? Or that if a Kafir has one head, a Muslim will have two? You will say: No. It does not mean that; it means that there should be a difference between the end result of a Muslim's life and a Kafir's life. The end result of a Kafir's life is failure: he will be deprived of God's mercy in that-world, in the Hereafter, and be totally wretched; while that of a Muslim's is success: he will win the pleasure of God and be happy and honoured there.

This-world and That-world

Your answer is correct. But now tell me: What is the nature of that-world? And, what is the meaning of being a failure in the Heareafter? What does it mean to be successful and honoured there?

We need not delay ourselves working out the answer to the first question, for it has already been given by the Prophet, blessings and peace be on him: 'This-world is the cultivating ground of the Hereafter'.

This-world and the Hereafter are not two separate entities, but a continuous process. This process begins in this-world and ends in the Hereafter. The relationship between the two is the same as that between cultivation and crop. You plough the land, sow the seeds, irrigate and tend field till such time as the crop is ready. When you have reaped the harvest, you feed yourselves it throughout the year.

You will naturally reap whatever you have sown in the land. If nothing is sown, nothing will grow. Whatever mistakes and errors you make in the course of ploughing, sowing irrigating and tending your fields, the effect will become apparent at the time of reaping the crop. But if you have carried out all the necessary preparations properly, you will get your reward at the time of reaping.

This is exactly the position in respect of this-world and that-world. This-world is like ground to be tilled. Man has been sent into this field for the purpose of raising a crop for himself by his own efforts and hard work. He has been allotted specific time---from birth till death---to do this task. Whatever type of crop he sows will be reaped in his life beyond the grave, and that produce will be the mainstay of his life in the Hereafter.

If you have sown good seed in the field of this-world throughout your lives and have

nourished it with water and careful supervision, you will find the fruits of your labours ready in the next life in the shape of beautiful gardens. You will be able to live happily on the fruits of the garden you have cultivated so assiduously throughout your earthly lives; you will not need to do any further hard work. This is Paradise, this is the success, the state of gratification in the Hereafter.

In contrast to this, if you sow thorns and grow bitter and poisonous plants during your lives on earth, you will reap a similar crop in the next life. You will not be given a second chance to grow a good crop and will have no choice but to sustain yourselves on the bad crop. You will have to lie on the bed of thorns which you have nurtured, and eat

The bitter, poisonous fruits you have grown. This is what is meant by being wretched and unsuccessful in the Hereafter.

Success in That-world

The same meaning of the Hereafter as I have described is given in the Qur'an and the Hadith. This shows that the success or failure of a man in the life after death depends on whether his knowledge and actions have been correct during his life on earth.

From the above it follows that the difference between Muslims and Kafirs in the Hereafter is determined by the difference which existed between them in the patterns of their lives on earth. Unless there is a difference between the knowledge and actions of a Muslim and Kafir in this-world there can be no difference between their ultimate states in the Hereafter. It is impossible that the knowledge and actions of a Muslim be the same as those of a Kafir without his suffering the fate that is destined for a Kafir.

True Purpose of the Kalimah

You said earlier that the purpose of reciting the Kalimah was to differentiate between the end results of a Kafir and a Muslim. Now, having discussed further the nature of the end result and of the Hereafter, we will have to rephrase your answer. Now you will have to say that the purpose of reciting the Kalimah is to set right man's knowledge and actions here in this-world so that ultimately he attains happiness in that-world. This Kalimah teaches us to plant that garden whose fruits we will pick in the Hereafter. If we do not believe in the Kalimah how can we plant the garden and from where will we pick its fruits in the Hereafter? And if we merely utter the words of the Kalimah without it correcting our knowledge and if our actions too remain the same as if we had not uttered it.

Would you, then, not agree that it is pointless to utter the Kalimah without letting it change our thoughts and deeds? There is no reason why our fates in this case should be different from those of Kafirs. We do not put God under any obligation by merely uttering the Kalimah. If we do not learn how to plant a garden, and instead sow

thorns all our lives, we cannot expect to inherit a flourishing garden with fruits in the next world. Several examples are before you to show that it is meaningless to do something if an identical outcome would result if you had done nothing. Medicine is not medicine if a patient's condition remains the same after using it. In the same way, if a Kalimah reciter's knowledge and actions remain the same as those of a non-reciter, such a recital is meaningless. If no difference exists between the lives of Kafirs and Muslims on earth, how can there be any difference between their lives in the Hereafter?

What Does the Kalimah Teach Us?

What, then, is the nature of the knowledge which the Kalimah Tayyibah imparts to us? And what difference takes place between the actions of a Muslim and a Kafir after acquiring this knowledge?

One: Submission to Allah. The first thing that you learn from this Kalimah is that you are slaves of Allah, and of Allah alone. Fully understand this profound truth, and you will be automatically led to the realization that, in this world, you must live according to the will be tantamount to rebellion against your Master.

Two: Obedience to the Prophet. The second thing that you learn from the Kalimah is that Muhammad, blessings and peace be on him, is the Messenger of Allah. Having learnt this, it immediately becomes self-evident that, to grow flowers and fruits in this world instead of thorns and poisonous plants, you have to plant your gardens as he has taught you. If you follow his way, you will reap a fine harvest in the Hereafter; but if you act against his way, you will grow thorns in this world and reap only thorns in the Hereafter.

Actions Must Accord With Knowledge

When you have acquired this knowledge it is essential that your actions should be in conformity with it. If you believe that you have to die one day, that after death there is another life, and that in that life you will have to sustain yourselves solely on that crop which you produced in this world before leaving it, then it is scarcely possible for you to deviate from the path shown by the Prophet, blessings and peace be on him. Why do you cultivate your fields in this world? Simply because no crops will grow unless you do and that without a crop you will die of starvation. If you have not been certain of this, if you had thought that a crop could grow without cultivation, or that you could satisfy your hunger without crops, you would never have laboured to cultivate the fields. In other words, your actions accorded with your knowledge.

Judge your position with respect to the Kalimah in like manner. You assert that you accept God as your Master and the Muhammad, blessings and peace be on him, as Gods's Messenger. You also affirm belief in life after death. Why should, then, your actions run counter to Quranic teachings and the Prophet's Sunnah? Such undoubtedly

is the result of weak faith. If you really have faith that your fate in the Hereafter depends on your behaviour in this life, you would never risk being negligent in living as God wills you to live. Only someone who does not really believe that what he is sowing will produce thorns and that these thorns will cause him harm would do such a thing. You never pick up embers in your hand knowingly because you know that they will burn you. Only children put their hands in the fire because they do not know what will happen.